

## Flexible Work Arrangement and Employees' Performance during Covid- 19 Era in Selected Micro-Finance Banks in Enugu State

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### Abstract

This study examined Flexible Work Arrangement and Employees' Performance in Selected Micro-Finance Banks in Enugu State. The study was guided by two objectives which were designed in consistency with the research questions and hypotheses. The study covered a population of 140 employees of the ten selected micro finance banks while its sampled size is 104. Data was collected primarily through a five point likert scale questionnaire themed; Flexible Work Arrangement and Employees' Performance questionnaire (FWA&EPQ) after subjecting it to validity and reliability check while the data analysis was done using Simple Regression with the aid of 23.0 versions of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) The emerging public health issues coupled with rising demand for a work process that allow more time and freedom to the employees has made the rethinking of traditional work process pertinent. This study therefore concludes that in order to improve the performance of employees in the prevailing social circumstances, flexible work arrangement is a preferred option. In line with the findings and conclusion above, the following recommendations were made by the researchers; Adoption of flexible work arrangement is very key in the enhancement of employees' performance and that Job sharing is important in fast-tracking efficiency of the employees by reducing if not eliminating job-over-load which can lead to stress and subsequently inefficiency; hence, it should be adopted by organizations.

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**Keywords:** Efficiency, Employee Autonomy, Employee Performance, FWA, Job Sharing, Innovativeness

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### INTRODUCTION

The drive towards competitiveness, technology adoption into work processes, employees growing knowledge about their industrial rights, seamless access to industry and work related information among other revolutionary trends have combined to redefine the way and manner organizations manage their resources. In the resource mix of organizations, human resource is unarguably acknowledged as the most important. This presumed importance is not unconnected with its primary role of determining the goals of the organization and knitting other resources to achieve same.

It is therefore of essence that every forward looking organization must give due attention to their ever changing needs. In today's environment, outside employers demand for increased productivity and employees growing need for better remuneration and welfare, one demand that stands out is the demand for safety at work. The outbreak of Corona Virus (Covid-

19) took the world by surprise especially the less developed and developing nations whose capacity to swiftly respond to such is in the woods. Hence, corporate organizations at the advent of this monstrous public health challenge aligned to the advice of Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) for non pharmaceutical interventions which include among others physical distancing. This has led to the redesigning of both work stations and work processes in many organizations.

During the first wave of the pandemic, number of employees in an enclosed work environment per time was drastically reduced, thereby reducing the operational capacity of plants. While some organizations waited for the situation to abate in order to resume full engagement of their operational capacities, others turned to flexible working arrangements (FWAs) as a preferred approach to optimizing their operational capacities leveraging

diverse technologies. This has largely changed the traditional ways of management and business operations.

Regus (1) argues that the employees of today consist of people who desire more freedom of choice as it affects where, when and how they work. This desire is driven by the physical and psychological need to balance their work demand with other social engagements such as family needs. Their expectation is that such balance will help to reduce stress, burnout and ultimately enhance their performance on the job. In the view of [2], flexible work arrangements is explained as an arrangements, which confers certain flexibility and choice of control on the employees, by so doing, employees are permitted to adjust their working hours and the place of work. Emphasizing the significance of FWAs, [3], posit that FWAs help employees to cope better with the competing stresses between home and work demands by improving employees' experience of the interaction between their work and personal life (home) roles.

Flexible work arrangements are reflected through work and work process designs such as flexitime, telecommuting or teleworking, job sharing and a variety of temporary work contract arrangements.

Micro-finance banks like every other organizations are not just the physical structures (buildings) reason being that such buildings though as important as they may be in providing a face and shelter to the organization and employees, are not the most important aspects of organizations. On establishment of organizations, people are hired to help stir the affairs of the organizations so as to achieve the visions, objectives and missions. These people are regarded as the most important assets to organizations.

Jackson (4) avers that the most valuable assets that companies have in hand are the employees. An organization is never static, it evolves in response to its changing technological and business environment, and these alterations may lead to a change in the nature of work performed, the time and how employees performance are obtained in the organization. Performance is the art to complete the task within the defined boundaries, performance of employees is affected by numerous factors at workplace it is defined as the way to perform job task according to the prescribed job description [5].

Motowidlo (6), argued that employee's performance is the behaviour that the organization expects of the employees when they are doing the job. Employees' performance is how the employees understand the task, the ability to do it and how much they exert effort to complete it. Mwebi, and Kadaga (7) posit that employee performance refers to how a worker behaves

towards his/her job, there are a variety of criteria used to determine how an individual behaves towards their work which vary from task to task.

### **Statement of Problem**

The emergence of the corona virus disease (Covid-19) as a global health challenge brought with it a redefinition of the operational models of organizations. This in no doubt is not without increased cost which is affecting in no small measure the competitiveness of different organizations. While researchers have focused largely on understanding how the emerging operational models may have affected organizational performance, a few has looked towards the effects of these models on employees' performance. It is no doubt that employees are acknowledged as the most important of all resources in the resource mix of organizations but most times, they are neglected especially when their tasks are been structured.

The Covid-19 pandemic with its protocols for self protection caused organizations to introduce operational models such as telecommuting, flexi-time, Job sharing and autonomous work model. These models may have impaired or spurred performance of the employees as they require more of self supervision. The challenge therefore is the tendency of employees to engage in all manner of loafing and other counter-productive work behaviours which at the long run may affect their efficiency, innovativeness and commitment negatively. This study is therefore faced with the problem of examining how flexible work arrangements affect the performance of employees in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the effects of flexible work arrangements on employees' performance in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State. The specific objectives of the study are to;

- i. Examine the effects of employees autonomy on their innovativeness in selected Micro- finance Banks in Enugu State
- ii. Find out the effects of job sharing on employees' efficiency in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to provide a guide to the study;

- i. What are the effects of employees' autonomy on their innovativeness in selected Micro- finance Banks in Enugu State?
- ii. What are the effects of job sharing on employees' efficiency in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were made in the study

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Employees autonomy does not have significant effect on the innovativeness of employees' in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Job sharing does not have significant effects on the efficiency of employees in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### ***Understanding the Concept of Flexible Working Arrangement***

Flexible working arrangement relates to an organization working arrangement in terms of working time, working location and pattern of working. Flexible working arrangements like flexible part time, shift work, compressed work hours and job sharing are often used to help employees in balancing their family and work-life during 'core hours' which is usually fixed or a period between the latest permissible starting time and earliest permissible finishing time [8]. Gerdenitsch, Kubicek, & Korunka, (9) explained that employees are given more autonomy over their jobs (when and where to work) as fixed working is now replaced by schedule working practices, employees have more options as from where to do their task (e.g. café, home, plane) or within an organization (e.g. hot desking). Sometimes, flexible working arrangements help to increase job satisfaction and maintain work-life balance but often contribute to work augmentation and work-life conflicts. The term flexibility refers to both positive and negative imputes. One as a strategic initiative of employers to increase the business requirements of the firm, on the other hand meet the demand of employees to balance work and life [10]. Flexible working arrangements are actually emerging issues in human resource management field. The world is becoming a global village; hence as an employee in any organization the balance between personal life and work responsibilities should not be ignored, if the employee performance is to be achieved.

#### **Dimensions of Flexible Working Arrangement**

***Flexible Hours:*** Flexi hour's scheme offers the control to the beginning and ending of the work schedule. It facilitates employees to fulfill their non-labor commitments including childcare, household chores or personal activities [11]. Flexi-time is an arrangement which enables employees to choose when they start or finish their work than the usual time, provided they complete a certain number of hours [12]. Flexi-time enables organizations to have employees working in extended time without any increase in costs. Yang & Zheng, (13) explained family-oriented improvement program under flexible hours, where an employee could choose their starting and ending working hours

and enjoy its benefits. Firstly, it is inferred that such employees work efficiently and effectively. Secondly, it helps in mitigating organizational problems like absenteeism, employee turnover and job stress. Thirdly, it improves employee's retention rate and; finally, it contributes to healthy and positive balance between personal and professional life. Flexi-time has limitation of making the organization to incur additional costs in setting a timekeeping system; the managers experience problems of supervising and rescheduling employees work [14].

***Contractual Working:*** Contingent working is another name of contractual workings. Under contingent workings, employees are hired on temporary and time bound contract [15]. According to [8], temporary contracts are hard to measure since its evaluation is based on the job to be done. This has created different views based on; lack of loyalty, insecurity, low esteem, high absenteeism and low productivity. Though it can be considered to evaluate the employee for further consideration and avoid wrong decisions taken by manager as well as used in job fluctuating industries to regulate balance or satisfy a job undertaking. [16] added that it may be productive and cheaper in terms of recruitment and training, but the overall cost will increase as compared to some who are in fixed employment (permanent).

***Work Shifts:*** according to [8], working in shifts helps in consuming more hours in a day by incorporating more than one shift in a working day. It enables more human hours to be worked than the traditional day work system. It can be in a form of night shift, evening, early morning or rotating shifts. According to International Labor Organization, work shifts help the employees to improve one another at the workplace, so that the operations can last longer than hours of work of a worker at day and night hours. Shift arrangement is vital practice since it helps in reducing accidents and fatigue, which realize in organization's long run productivity.

***Telecommuting/Working From Home:*** Caillier, (17) posit that as teleworkers increases in agencies, the number of employees who quits decreases. Aguilera, Lethiais, Rallet, & Proulhac, (18) reported that telecommuting is fairly a restricted fact, generally it is an informal working arrangement as its advantages are paired with immediate disadvantages. The main purpose of this flexibility offered to staff is to decrease stress, burnout and fatigue. They further explained teleworkers as the people who do not work (on regular basis or not) from fixed location outside the office or area of employer; thus, self-employed individuals are not included here.

**Compressed Work Week:** Compressed work week is an agreement in which employees' works for more hours by prolonging the length of work days in a week [19]. Employees may opt to work for four days in a week to get a day off. Poor (20) ascertains that the common type of compressed hours is made up of ten hours per day making forty hours for 4 days. The employee could therefore be in a position to take a day off either Monday or Friday.

According to Bird (21) compressed work hours increases production and job satisfaction improves as well as reducing absenteeism. Compressed work week has limitations. Work may be disrupted if most employees are absent due to emergencies since it would be difficult to provide for employees to alternate; Employees health may be affected as a result of working for long hours; Meetings and training of employees may also be affected due to different work schedules; Managers may also fail to provide supervision when employees work for extended hours.

**Job Sharing:** According to Bliss and Thornton (22) job sharing enables two employees to carry out the tasks of full-time job by alternating. This was meant to provide solutions for those jobs which could not be divided into two part time jobs.

According to Branine (23) job sharing option allows two employees to alternate work responsibilities. Each employee works on half time basis, for instance, one employee reporting in the morning and the other in the afternoon. However, the employees need to have complementary skills [25]. Organizations practicing this form of flexibility have the advantage of sourcing employees skills and experience in one job; enables tapping of employees talents; learning from each other; reliefs employees while away; Job sharers are able to maintain their jobs on full time basis [26]. The greatest problem arises in getting a suitable partner. If the job sharers are not compatible the arrangement may not work. The issue of overhead costs also arises due to trainings, employee compensations, office machines and equipment.

### **Benefits of Flexible Work Arrangement**

Employers introduced flexible work initiatives so that they can attract, recruit and retain qualified employees into their organization [27]. When employees know they can schedule their work, this gives them a sense of support that the organizations care about his working and non-working life resulting in the following:

❖ **Increased Quality Productivity:** Al-Rajudi, (28) elucidated that mothers that are allowed to take the options of Telecommuting after child delivery or birth recorded decreased turnover and increased productivity. This increased productivity is directly linked to the presence of family friendly policies (29).

❖ **Increase Employee Loyalty:** When employers give greater flexibility in the work place they give employee the option of having greater control of where and where to work, allowing them to enjoy optimum work-life balance. This makes employees satisfied and loyal.

❖ **Enhanced Access to Employment:** The introduction of flexible work arrangements has enhanced the equality and greater opportunity for women to join irrespective of their marital status and even form a large part of the workforce

❖ **Meeting Customer Needs:** Flexibility provides the opportunities for organizations to meet the challenges in the global environment that is increasing on the daily basis by providing business continuity with wide customer coverage.

❖ **Increased Energy and Creativity:** Energy is defined as the ability to work. Flexible work arrangements produce the energy in employees leading to the ability to go beyond the given task, thereby enhancing creativity.

❖ **Prevent Work-Family Conflict:** Flexible work arrangements help to balance employee work and family tasks. Flexible work arrangements help to reduce the hours' employers use at work which results into lower levels of work-family conflict [30].

❖ **More Senior Women:** flexibly work arrangement has helped working mothers in particular and employees that are returning from maternity leave, and this has often lead to increase in women that has reached most senior levels in the organization.

❖ **Reduced Business Travel:** Flexible working arrangements have a positive effect on business travel, leading to reductions in operational costs. Consequently, flexible working arrangements reduced employees' pressure on travel as work issues can be detected and solved using the computers [31].

### **Challenges and Consequences of Flexible Work Arrangements**

Some of the challenges associated with flexible work arrangement include;

✚ **Resistance to Change:** Employers may resist the change because of the challenges it brings along with it such as increased cost of training and also difficulties in managing flexible workforce. Change though inevitable could be resisted especially where is initiated by the employees.

✚ **Lack of trust:** This may arise as a result of previous negative experiences. Managers do not trust their employees or group members to work productively and efficiently, especially when not being closely supervised [32].

✚ **Financial Difficulties:** Most of the time employers look at the financial implication as the main cause for not implementing flexible work arrangements, this is not disputable as FWA practices

such as telecommuting relies on the availability of technology and this is very costly.

✚ **Organizational Culture:** organizational culture is a mobilizing force reflecting employer's view and the implementation of the available flexible work arrangements. However, some organizations do not act very excited in implementing these arrangements because it has not been incorporated into their culture.

✚ **Loss of control:** Managers fear that they may be unable to control their subordinates as they normally would in the traditional work arrangement, this can lead to resistance to FWA

✚ **Lack of Guidance and Support:** Inadequate guidance and support from the management may lead to isolation and reduced visibility of employees which at the long run affects productivity and career progression [31].

✚ **Personal Beliefs and Attributes:** Employee's believes that their physical communication and visibility with their bosses is an imperative factor for their personal growth and these arrangements may adversely affect other work outcomes. The reasoning is that managers can acknowledge employee tasks and contribution, and give feedback faster [33].

### **The Concept of Employee Performance**

Every organization requires highly performing individuals in order to ensure competitive advantage and attainment of corporate goals. High employee performance is therefore one of the critical determinants of the level of organizational productivity and accomplishments. Accomplishing tasks and performing at a high level can be a source of satisfaction, with feelings of mastery and pride. In defining the concept of employee performance, Sonnentag (34) differentiates between an action (i.e. behavioural) aspect and an outcome aspect of performance.

The behavioral aspect refers to what an individual does in the work situation. It encompasses behaviors such as assembling parts of a car engine, selling personal computers, teaching basic reading skills to elementary school children, or performing heart surgery. The outcome aspect refers to the consequence or result of the individual's behavior. The above described behaviors may result in outcomes such as numbers of engines assembled, pupils' reading proficiency, sales figures, or number of successful heart operations. In simple terms, employee performance can be defined as the extent to which an organizational member contributes to achieving the goals of the organization. Employee performance is defined as work related task that is expected on employees and how well the task was done [16].

### **Dimensions of Employees Performance**

The indicators of employee performance used in this study are briefly discussed below;

*Employees Efficiency:* According to Richards (35) employees have a certain number of tasks that they can accomplish over a period of time. But unlike factory outputs, employee's outputs are rarely consistent; hence, one person may get much more done than another person in the same timeframe. Doucouliagos and Laoroche (36) defined employee efficiency as the ability to act or produce effectively with a minimum of waste, expenditure or unnecessary effort. The focus is on the resources and speed with which organizational goals are achieved

*Innovativeness:* Employee innovativeness can be defined as an engagement in innovative behaviours, which includes behaviours related to the innovation process, i.e. idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization with the aim of producing innovations [37]. Innovations which have to do with the implementation or adoption of novel ideas can in turn be categorized as either technological (changes in products, services, production processes) or administrative (changes in activities, social processes, structures), and as either radical or incremental, depending on the extent of their influence for existing products or processes.

### **Theoretical Review**

*Spill over Theory:* Spill over theory was postulated in 1979 by Piotrkowski. The theory actually talks about work and family life. The author advocated that job related factors and family related factors should be in equilibrium for employees to be productive, bring about customer satisfaction, have job satisfaction and control their employee turnover. The central thesis of the theory was to control work related stress or family life related stress so that it does not spill over to work or family life [38]. This means that social imbalance affects the work efficiency and effectiveness of an individual employee.

*Self-Determination Theory:* Self-determination theory was developed by Ryan and Deci in 2000. Self-determination theory brings about the issue of autonomous motivation. Voluntary motive makes employees prefer temporary contracts as a form of flexible working since it brings about better productivity, new ideas (innovations) which at long run yields job satisfaction to the employees. [38] claimed that self-motivation theory can be categorized into: autonomous which relates to relationships such as family and controlled motives such as power which relates to achieving specific goals. They further said that for productivity, controlled employee turnover, job satisfaction and customers' satisfaction employees should be motivated through issues like flexible working arrangements.

**METHODOLOGY**

The design for this study is the survey research. The data used in the study were generated from two major sources namely primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include; questionnaire and researcher’s direct observation, while the secondary sources are journals, articles, internet, textbooks, records and publications of the organizations. The population for this study consists of members of staff of selected micro finance banks in Enugu State which is given by available records from the human resource department of the selected banks as 140 while Sample size is 104 staff. The major instrument for data collection is a five point likert scale questionnaire titled Flexible Work Arrangement and Employees Performance questionnaire (FWAandEPQ). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation while its reliability index was determined using Cronbach Alpha which yielded an output of .91 or 91%. Inferential statistics was used to analyze the data via simple regression with the aid of 23.0 versions of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Model Specification**

$$DV = f(IV)$$

This is translated thus;

$$A = \delta + \beta_1 IV + e_i \quad \text{Where; } IV =$$

Independent Variable,  $\delta$  = Intercept,  $\beta$  = Un-standardised Coefficient and  $e_i$  = Error Margin.

Therefore, the models for the testing of hypotheses are;  
I = f(A)

$$I = \delta + \beta_1 A + e_i \quad \dots(1)$$

$$EE = f(JS)$$

$$EE = \delta + \beta_1 JS + e_i \quad \dots (2)$$

**RESULTS**

**Hypothesis One:**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Employees autonomy does not have significant effect on the innovativeness of employees’ in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.943 <sup>a</sup>	.888	.887	.33031	.393

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Autonomy1
- b. Dependent Variable: Innovativeness

The Model Summary indicate that R .943, the R squared .888, the Adjusted R square .887 and the Standard Error of the Estimate .33031. The Durbin Watson is .393 which indicates that the data has no redundant variable.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	80.759	1	80.759	740.195	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	10.147	93	.109		
	Total	90.905	94			

- a. Dependent Variable: Innovativeness
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Autonomy1

The ANOVA has an F score of 740.195 and is statistically significant at .000 which is below the .01 margin of error. This implies that the model was a good fit and that the coefficient of simple correlations R is significantly different from zero.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.089	.076		-1.173	.244
	Autonomy1	.997	.037	.943	27.207	.000

- a. Dependent Variable: Innovativeness

The coefficients show a significant relationship and the hypotheses was accepted in the alternate form, hence, employees autonomy was found to have significant relationship with innovativeness ( $\beta = .943$ ;  $t = 27.207$ ;  $P < .000$ )

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Job sharing does not have significant effects on the efficiency of employees in selected Micro-finance Banks in Enugu State

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.910 <sup>a</sup>	.827	.826	.45025	.435

a. Predictors: (Constant), Job Sharing

b. Dependent Variable: Employees Efficiency

The Model Summary indicate that R .910, the R squared .827, the Adjusted R square .826 and the Standard Error of the Estimate is .45025. The Durbin Watson is .435 which indicates that the data has no redundant variable.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	90.367	1	90.367	445.754	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	18.854	93	.203		
	Total	109.221	94			

a. Dependent Variable: Employees Efficiency

b. Predictors: (Constant), Job Sharing

The ANOVA which has F score of 445.754 is statistically significant at .000 which is below the .01 margin of error. This implies that the model was a good fit and that the coefficient of simple correlations R is significantly different from zero.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.192	.092		2.091	.039
	Job Sharing	1.024	.049	.910	21.113	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employees Efficiency

The coefficients shows a significant relationship and the hypotheses was accepted in the alternate form. This implies that Job Sharing was found to have significant relationship with Employee Efficiency ( $\beta = .910$ ;  $t = 21.113$ ;  $P < .000$ )

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The SPSS output as shown in the table above indicates that employees autonomy has significant relationship with innovativeness ( $\beta = .943$ ;  $t = 27.207$ ;  $P < .000$ ) at 0.000 significant levels. This prompted the researchers to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate. This supports the findings of Burcharth, Præst and Søndergaard (39) wherein they averred that employee autonomy fully mediates the relationship between openness and innovation. The result from hypothesis two indicates that job sharing has significant effect on employees efficiency ( $\beta = .910$ ;  $t = 21.113$ ;  $P < .000$ ). The relationship that exists between job sharing and employee's efficiency was shown to be significant at 0.000 significant levels. Hence the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This result strengthened the argument of Nixon and Egessa (40) who in their study found that job sharing significantly affects employee performance.

## CONCLUSION

The emerging public health issues coupled with rising demand for a work process that allow more time and freedom to the employees has made the rethinking of traditional work process pertinent. This study therefore concludes that in order to improve the performance of employees in the prevailing social circumstances, flexible work arrangement is a preferred option

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings and conclusion above, the following recommendations were made by the researcher;

- (1) Adoption of flexible work arrangement is very key in the enhancement of employees' performance
- (2) Job sharing is important in fast-tracking efficiency of the employees by reducing if not eliminating job-over-load which can lead to stress and subsequently inefficiency, hence it should be adopted by organizations

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